

Fourth Quarter Strategies – Saturday, January 7, 2017

Some of you may disagree, but I personally feel “It’s a wonderful life!” I missed catching the original film by that name this Christmas season, but I can certainly recall the story and the message conveyed in one of the classic movies of all times. *“It’s a Wonderful Life”* hit the box office in 1946 during a time of healing for our country and marked the first film produced and directed by Frank Capra and first starring role for Jimmy Stewart after both men returned from sacrificing five years of their lives for their country. The film was nominated for five Academy Awards including best picture. Stewart’s role as George Bailey, a man who had given up his dreams to help others then despondently decides to commit suicide by jumping off a bridge into the icy waters below on Christmas eve, sets the stage for a sobering portrayal of the value of life. George Bailey’s guardian angel, Clarence Odbody, during the next hour of the film helps him see the significance of his life to the Bedford Falls community, leading him to ask for a second chance, which he is granted. Enough on the story for now at least.

It’s quite easy to get discouraged in life and feel that we have nothing to offer this complex world. Yes, this is a complex world, but it’s really not about the world at all. It’s quite easy to get caught up in all that’s going on around us and feel out-of-control. You see, I figured out years ago that my life purpose is not to make a huge splash in this world. God has created each of us for His distinct purpose. Life is not about reaching goals. Life is a process and each day brings new opportunities to make a distinct difference in the lives God places in our path. That thought may seem simplistic until you start to experience just how God orchestrates your personal story. The sooner you come to realize the intricacies of God actively working in your life, the sooner you will be able to sense the reality found in the personal relationship He wishes to have with all His creation.

Let’s go back to Jimmy Stewart and consider the impact this role must have had on his life. Upon returning from the war, Stewart found himself despondent and fearful to return to Hollywood and competing for lead roles with the new generation of male stars that had been discovered during his absence. These days, his condition would have been diagnosed as PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). I believe God actually used this unique role to resurrect Stewart’s movie career. Capra’s career was also resurrected in the process. So, two very successful men patriotically gave up prime years of their working lives and both were greatly rewarded for their unselfish service to their country. As a side note, Frank Capra won three Academy Awards during his successful movie career. Stewart was nominated for five Academy Awards winning in 1941 for *The Philadelphia Story*.

There’s a scene in *It’s a Wonderful Life* near the end of the movie where George Bailey breaks down in a pub and cries and prays, *“God...God... dear Father in Heaven. I’m not a praying man, but if You’re up there and You can hear me, show me the way, I’m at the end of my rope. Show me the way God.”* In a interview with *Guideposts*, Jimmy Stewart recalled the impact that scene had on his personal life and the hopelessness many people face in life who feel they have nowhere to turn.

I’ve found that life is filled with many twists and turns and we’d be wise to realize that each day brings us the opportunity to grow closer to Him and to know ourselves better through the process. We simply cannot allow the obstacles we face to get in the way of growing closer to God and learning more about the plans He has for our lives. In Jeremiah 29:11 we’re reminded, *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* So, I suggest you come to realize the wonderful gift of life that you’ve been given, live it to the fullest and fasten your seat belts! Oh yes, I know it can be easy to take credit for all that goes favorably and turn right around and blame others and God when times are tough. I suggest you put such thoughts behind you and watch God work in all circumstances this day forward.

Here to serve,

Jim Langley. CLU

Passages to Ponder: Isaiah 48:17; Romans 8:28; Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Timothy 4:10; Hebrews 11:1-3; 1 Peter 1: 3, 21, 3:15

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Isaiah 48:17 New International Version (NIV)

¹⁷This is what the LORD says—

your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:

“I am the LORD your God,

who teaches you what is best for you,

who directs you in the way you should go.

Romans 8:28 New International Version (NIV)

²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Philippians 4:6-7 New International Version (NIV)

⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 4:10 New International Version (NIV)

¹⁰That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.

Hebrews 11:1-3 New International Version (NIV)

¹Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ²This is what the ancients were commended for.

³By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

1 Peter 1:3 New International Version (NIV)

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1 Peter 1:21 New International Version (NIV)

²¹Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

1 Peter 3:15 New International Version (NIV)

¹⁵But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,